

Human Services Committee
November 3, 2015
Roughrider Room
Kathy Hogan, Chair

Good afternoon Chairwoman Hogan and members of the Human Services Interim Committee.

My name is Siobhan Deppa and I have been a consumer of behavioral health services in North Dakota for 25 years. I am an active self-advocate for more programs and services which help meet the unmet needs of consumers and families in North Dakota.

One such program, which no longer exists in its entirety, is the Peer-to-Peer, one-on-one support, program. The legislature did not choose to fully expand funding for this consumer-centered support program.

I would like to share my personal perspective as a behavioral health consumer who benefited immeasurably from this program when it was fully funded, and one-on-one peer support was offered four years ago. I credit my continued sobriety of six years, and current mental health stability, to this effective and personally transforming experience. Let me please share with you today just a handful of the benefits of having this program operating with peer support specialists helping behavioral health consumers personally one-on-one, much like me.

- Together we created an attainable and maintainable recovery plan by defining what being recovered meant to me and how to go about getting there.
- Worked together on a lifestyle make over without alcohol, while strengthening my mental health. Coping skills that they themselves found successful in their life and finding my own personal strengths tailored to my lifestyle and recovery path.
- Was an example to me that recovery is attainable, regardless of the mental health diagnosis and addiction.
- I instantly felt a rapport with her and trust. My Peer Specialist was professional without being intimidating and I felt non-judged, able to honestly share my feelings and experiences I've been through, both good and bad.

- I regained a positive sense of self and a meaningful sense of belonging I had lost along the way with my experiences.
- Understood the challenges I faced on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis. Was familiar with the culture, community and circumstances which recoveries live with.
- Helped me function with a new found sense of confidence. Was given encouragement to reconnect with hobbies I had given up and tried some new ones.
- Helped me become the active consumer advocate for myself that I am today, participating in many behavioral health networks, councils and volunteer activities.

There are many more ways in which one-on-one peer support services enriched my whole life.

Please make this a priority for increased funding, sooner than later. Because now is when consumers need the help of this program in its entirety, including one-on-one peer support specialists. This I see as one solution for more than a few behavioral health care concerns your committee faces. According to the Schulte Report, a full, one-on-one peer support program across the state was the overwhelming request amongst behavioral health care consumers.

Thank you Chairwoman Hogan and the Human Services Interim Committee members for listening to my request of increased funding for peer support, including state-wide peer-to-peer, one-on-one services. Are there any questions I may be able to answer for you today?

Please contact me with any questions, or if I may help you in any way possible to make behavioral health care in North Dakota the BEST that's available to the consumer and their families in the country. My e-mail address and cell phone number are at the bottom of this testimony.

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